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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the career approach in foreign language instruction, and defines three dimensions for this approach: (1) information, that is, current data about actual jobs requiring language skills, (2) public awareness, and (3) curriculum, that is, providing courses that meet the needs of a career-oriented approach. These three dimensions lead necessarily to activity in other fields, specifically (1) information gathering; (2) bringing information about languages and jobs to the attention of the public, including students, parents, counselors, school administrators and members of the business community; and (3) curriculum development. Due to declining enrollments and changing student attitudes and needs, foreign language departments need to redefine their goals with a realistic approach to the place of language skills in actual career planning. With this approach, language needs to be offered not as a primary skill but rather as an auxiliary or supportive one. Materials appropriate for career-oriented language courses are needed, and the career approach will also undoubtedly affect teacher training. In addition, interaction between the school and the community is needed, partially in the form of adult language programs, a few of which are described here. (CLK)

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CAREERS AND THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT*

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Earlier this year after an unusually long and protracted pregnancy the MLA managed to produce a short pamphlet entitled "Foreign Languages and Careers."[1] The pamphlet, I am happy to say, has been well received by the profession itself and looks as though it may also be of some help in getting our message across to the general lay public for whom it was intended. Contained in it are some thirty pages of generalized information, much of it anecdotal, about the value of foreign language competence as an auxiliary or supportive skill in a variety of occupations and professions. The report was produced in response to a genuine need expressed by our own profession, and its sales record since publication last May suggests that the need is still real and pervasive.

The careers "angle," or the career-oriented approach to curriculum in foreign languages, is receiving a great deal of attention in our professional circles lately, both at state and regional meetings, and in various journals, newsletters, and reports. I for one have given more than a dozen talks on this subject in recent months, and there are several other colleagues who have developed information and theory in this area, among them the late Dr. Florence Steiner, a wonderful educator and person, whose leadership in this and in many other fields of foreign language education will be sorely missed. I would refer you to Dr. Steiner's article in the April 1974 issue of the *Modern Language Journal*,[2] and, by way of additional literature, to the chapter on "Career Education" by Kenneth Lester and Toby Tamarkin in volume five (1973) of the *ACTFL Review of Foreign Language Education*,[3] and to the report of Working Committee III in the *1974 Northeast Conference Reports*.[4]

Apart from the excellent articles I have just cited, fundamental research in this field has been fairly limited in recent years. In 1972 we at the MLA conducted a low-budget survey of the needs for language skills in business and industry, and the results of our investigation are reflected in our newly-published pamphlet.[5] Currently in progress is a larger and better-budgeted survey project called "Languages for the World of Work," conducted by Professor Ernest Wilkins of Brigham Young University. I have seen Professor Wilkins' research plan and questionnaire, and I am quite confident that his results will yield the kind of specific employment information that teachers will find helpful.

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No one working in this field has any illusions, I am sure, that the career approach can become the panacea or the golden road to salvation and prosperity for the profession, but we are agreed that it is the kind of approach that has great potential for stimulating both a new interest in foreign languages on the one hand, and new curricular thinking, on the other. Like a well-trained American consumer, I believe very strongly in the value of timely and intelligent *marketing;* but I also know that it is pointless and ultimately self-defeating to attempt to market an ineffective or obsolete product. In our case, efforts to improve our image or to create a new demand for what we have to offer must go hand in hand with improvements in instruction and with an improved awareness of what we are teaching and why and to whom.

The "career approach," then, as I see it, has three dimensions, and our collective efforts in this direction should be channelled into all three at once, if possible. Simply stated, they are *information, public awareness,* and *curriculum.* The lines between them are not easily drawn, and there is considerable overlap and feedback. By *information* I mean up-to-date data about actual jobs in business, industry, and service organizations in which language competence is an auxiliary or supportive skill. By *public awareness* I mean strong and persistent efforts on the part of the teaching profession itself—since I know of no agency that will do the job for us—to bring information about languages and jobs to the attention of the public: students, parents, guidance counselors, admissions officers, school administrators, and, most important, the business and professional community. To the business community we give, if we can, a two-part message. The first message is: "Look here, business community: you need language skills" The second message is: "Look here, business community: we, the foreign language teaching profession, can supply those skills." Here is where the third dimension comes in, *curriculum,* because we very obviously will not be able to make that claim unless we are in fact able to teach courses that meet those needs. The principle behind all this, I suppose, is "truth in advertising," and we would all agree, I'm sure, that advertising cannot precede truth. But in my most optimistic moments I feel confident that we have an opportunity to set in motion an upward "spiral" consisting of a new curricular movement that will generate a new demand for our services and that this demand in turn will inspire innovation and creativity in curriculum.

* Delivered at the Fall 1974 Conference of PSMLA.

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It is a fact that enrollments in the proprietary or commercial language schools have been increasing recently in many cities across the country. Much of their enrollment comes from business executives needing a "crash" intensive course on short notice. Despite our collective private opinion of these schools they seem to be supplying the public with the instruction it wants when it wants it. I do not for a minute suggest that this kind of language instruction should become our exclusive or even principal function, but if the academic profession can acquire the knack of producing and "marketing" this kind of instruction in addition to the other things we do, we will have a good chance to repair our undeservedly damaged reputation, win new friends and financing, and, with luck, attract more students to those "other things," including our courses in literature and culture.

In sketching out this "upward spiral" I must plead guilty to being perhaps excessively visionary, to taking a rather large "leap of faith," yet I am convinced that many departments—particularly those in urban locations—have the capacity and potential for taking the necessary action to develop new markets. The development can take place, as I see it, in a series of steps, beginning presumably with an intensive self-examination on the part of the department, but not neglecting an examination of the institution of which it is a part and the population, or constituency, that it serves. These steps would lead eventually to a program of action in all three of the dimensions mentioned above: *information-gathering,* primarily from local sources; *public awareness,* both locally and through participation in a national program; and *curriculum development,* in a manner compatible with the identified needs of the constituency and the assessed resources of the department. Here a second "leap of faith" is called for: a department must be convinced that there is no inherent conflict between its traditional role as inheritor of a humanistic discipline and its eventual new role in the service of a career-oriented market. Personally, I am already satisfied that there is no conflict, and for two reasons: first, because the new role is simply an extension of our traditional role as teachers of the living language; and second, because a new focus on business and the professions, or "the world of work," as it is called in the jargon of career education, is simply an extension of the approach to culture (small "c"-culture) we have been developing over the last twenty years.

The current interest on the part of the foreign language teaching profession in occupational uses for language skills is, of course, nothing new or radical. Articles and pamphlets on this subject have been in circulation at least since the founding of the MLA's Foreign Language Program 22 years ago and have proliferated over the years, in good times as well as bad. The reason behind our interest, and the ultimate purpose of all the printed matter, is easy to explain: we have needed and still need an answer to the student who comes up to the desk after class, looks at us earnestly, and says, "You know, Mr. Brod, I like German, and I even like your class, but my problem is, what can I do with it?" Flattered though we may be by the student's interest, we must resist the temptation to give the kind of response I tried once early in my teaching career, when I said, full of confidence, "Well, I suppose you could always *teach.*" To which the student replied, bluntly but firmly, "But I don't want to be like *you*!"

Overcoming the shock to my ego contained in that answer, I soon developed a new line, and for years I talked about translating, interpreting, and in some vague way about "government service." It bothered me, of course, that I was ill-informed or non-informed about job requirements and employment needs in these occupations, but I knew there were some publications available on the subject, and I simply assumed that my students would find things out for themselves and that the Grand Old Free Enterprise System would do the rest.

At that time, ten or twelve years ago, I did not yet question this approach, any more than I saw any need to develop an intellectual *rationale* for foreign language study or a philosophy for the foreign language teaching profession. But that was ten years ago. In the meantime the foreign language requirement for the B.A. degree has eroded significantly—according to our MLA survey it has been reduced or abolished in about half the B.A.-granting colleges and universities in the United States—and we are now compelled to find ways to "sell" our product in a "free market" situation and to justify our place in the academic system intellectually, fiscally, and philosophically.[6] This poses a challenge, obviously, but it is possible that twenty years hence we shall be grateful for the challenge and for the changes it will have brought about. Like you, I have not lost my faith in the traditional values of language study nor my conviction that it belongs in the curriculum, but the realities are such that curricula, quite properly, are created by faculty and administrators for students, and the place of language instruction in the curriculum at any given institution depends upon the decisions of the decision-makers. The MLA's survey of B.A.-level language requirements, undertaken four years ago, showed conclusively that student resistance against the language requirement came less from a dislike of language study *per se* than from a rejection of requirements in general—of the whole idea of the fixed core curriculum. Admittedly, on many campuses the requirements question has become a matter of

political log-rolling and faculty squabbling about "protective tariffs"; ideally, however, it is and ought to be a philosophical question, and one that demands serious debate, on the part of any faculty that is honestly concerned about the kind of education it offers its students.

In any event, the erosion of the requirements has led to a serious drop in language enrollments, and fiscal cutbacks of various kinds have contributed to a continuing decline. In many schools and colleges languages have ceased to be a central part of the curriculum and have become something peripheral. From the point of view of cost-accounting we have become a marginal operation. This is unfair to us and to what we are trying to do, but it is part of a larger and more far-reaching trend. In any case, it has forced us to become aware of certain realities and to recognize that for the present, at least, or until such time as the idea of the core curriculum returns to American higher education, we will need to justify our existence and our subject matter to the current generation of students.

It would lead us too far astray to attempt to analyze what makes these students different from those in the past who appeared to accept what we had to offer without question. Not only are their backgrounds and values different from those of the past, but they are coming to us under different circumstances. Even the external conditions of the educational enterprise are different. It is obvious, for example, that the fixed, lock-step, four-year curriculum is no longer the only road to a diploma or degree or to knowledge. Education is not limited to a fixed age group in a fixed time span, five days a week, nine months a year, on an ivy-covered campus. We have only to look at some of our community colleges and some of our urban institutions in other categories, to realize that education can take place in all kinds of rooms, in office buildings, storefronts, and even factories, evenings, weekends, and in summer and for all ages of students, with a wide range of backgrounds and motivations.

My purpose in reviewing these familiar realities is simply to suggest that the pressure for "relevance" is not merely a shibboleth, and that the concept of career education, though it does indeed emanate from the U.S. Office of Education and the various state and local education agencies, is not merely another in a long series of educational fads invented by desk-bound bureaucrats. On the contrary, I think both are here to stay, for the reason that they derive directly from the process of democratization that has transformed American education over the last twenty to thirty years. The consequence of this process for us, however, is that we must bring the "case" for foreign language study to a group of students who are skeptical about it, who may never have experienced a second language, are convinced they will never need to use one, and may even be downright hostile to the idea of studying one. There are in fact some students, unfortunately, who are permanently unreceptive to language instruction, whether by nature or—more often than we might realize—because of negative conditioning in the English and language arts classrooms of American schools. I am not sure we can do anything at all for these students. But even for those who are reasonably receptive we will be called upon to demonstrate over and over again and in as many ways as possible that languages *exist*, that they are used by real people in real situations, and are not merely a set of learned behaviors for use in the germ-and-reality-free environment of the language laboratory.

"Now, then," a teacher may declare, "we realize that in the free market situation we have to learn to attract students on their own terms, and we realize, too, that it might be good for our cause to suggest to them that language can be useful in life situations, especially in occupational situations, but that leaves several unanswered questions. We still don't know precisely what to say when they ask 'What can I do with it?' And we don't have any hard data available to support our answer when they ask us for proof."

Having grappled with some of these questions for quite a while, I have finally managed to formulate some reasonable answers to them; and at the same time some of our colleagues have done the spade work necessary to dig up the supporting facts. There is, for example, finally some hard information available about the qualifications necessary for a *translator*. Clear job descriptions have been prepared, and a detailed outline of the high proficiency requirements and specialized academic preparation appropriate to a translating career has recently been set forth by a committee of the American Translators Association.[7] We also have a reasonably good idea of the limitations of the market for translators, and comparable information exists about the general state of the market in language-using positions in the federal government.[8] The hard-headed conclusion to be drawn from this information, of course, is that a career in translating is simply not a realistic possibility for the great majority of our students, including majors. Proper training in translating is at least as demanding and as extensive as the training necessary for a teaching career, and the opportunities, for the present at least, are severely limited.

It is pointless, therefore, to talk at great length about occupations in which language is the primary job skill, although certainly we do not want to discourage the gifted future teacher or translator when he or she comes along. But these careers do not give us the answer to the magic question, and for this reason most of us

have now begun to seek ways to make students aware of the value of language *as an auxiliary or supportive skill* in a wide variety of jobs and professions. This, in fact, is the principal and oft-repeated thesis of the MLA's recently published pamphlet. The "propaganda value" of this approach is quite substantial, for it enables us to associate language skills with a considerable range of career clusters and job categories, many of them quite attractive because of their prestige or earning capacity, such as medicine, law, journalism and media, business management, the travel industry, and so forth. It enables us to collect actual classified advertisements demonstrating the existence of actual jobs, as well as testimonials to the value of language study given by successful executives, community leaders, and personnel managers.[9]

I emphasize "propaganda value" because I feel, quite frankly, that the career aspect of language study is one we must exploit in our efforts to make language study more attractive generally. Of course, we *cannot* exploit it unless and until the career approach is somehow actually reflected in the curriculum. Conversely, however, teachers would probably do well *not* to become involved in a career-related program or curriculum unless and until they are able to incorporate it into a program of community "outreach" appropriate to their educational institution and its location—whether school or junior college or four-year institution, whether center city, suburban, or rural. Depending on the institution, their publicity efforts will involve, variously, parents, guidance counselors, local business leaders, personnel and employment specialists, leaders of the local ethnic communities, political leaders, media specialists, and in some cases even ordinary working people who happen to use a second language in their work.

The community "outreach" may, of course, go beyond meetings and media, and may include an actual instructional program planned and organized to meet the specific needs of a regular student or community group requesting instruction in a specific language for a specific purpose. A number of such courses are described in the article by Lester and Tamarkin, in the 1974 Northeast Conference *Reports*, and elsewhere in professional periodicals. Among the programs described are a set of adult education courses at Virginia Commonwealth University; French or Spanish typing and stenography at Franklin K. Lane High School in Brooklyn ,N.Y.; a career-oriented French skills unit in Marietta, Georgia; an individualized career program in German at Live Oak High School in Morgan Hill, California; a set of programmed-learning "packages" and short courses in commercial and vocational Spanish in Dade County, Florida; "Career Spanish" at Manchester Community College, Connecticut; an International Business course at St. Norbert College in Wisconsin; Russian for business at Douglass College, Rutgers University; the International Business Option at the University of Cincinnati; and many others.

Obviously, not every language department has the capacity in terms of budget and personnel to introduce specialized instruction outside of its regular day program. And, more to the point, not every department necessarily has the expertise to construct totally new specialized courses. Most departments, particularly at the college and university level, regard themselves as professionals in a world of professional specialties, and few are willing to sacrifice their professionalism on the altar of an interdisciplinary "movement" that might require them to work in areas beyond their competence. Their reluctance is entirely understandable, but the question of professionalism is not one that need necessarily prevent a department from seeking out appropriate ways of responding to the career interests of their actual and potential students. A department may legitimately reject the option of providing a separate specialized course with a career orientation, but it will still be able, if it so chooses, to find ways to *infuse* career information and a career approach into existing regular courses in language and culture. A vocabulary list, a cultural unit, even a grammar drill can be constructed to reflect a career orientation. Special programs can be planned, such as a "Career Day," with speakers invited from the business community, and information collected from local sources by the students themselves. Above all, attention can be paid to the foreign language *minor*, to the student who has already chosen a major in one of the natural sciences or social sciences, or in business, law, or another pre-professional program, but might be persuaded to elect a foreign language minor if he can be assured that it will give him the kind of communicative competence plus cultural information that will be supportive to his career plans.

And, à propos culture: the responses to the MLA's 1972 survey of the needs for language skills in business, industry, and service occupations demonstrated conclusively that the international business community is quite aware of its needs for information about foreign cultures and that in fact they define culture much the same way we do and recognize the need for cultural information in the training of personnel for international assignments.[10] Indeed, it is widely recognized that our "competitors," the proprietary or commercial language schools—most of whose enrollments have been rising rapidly—do not claim to teach culture and do not generally include much in the way of sophisticated cultural information in even the most successful of their custom-tailored inten-

sive courses. Recently a group of New York-based teachers have begun discussions with an important organization of business executives concerning the development of workshops or other short instructional units dealing with the concepts of business management as understood in various nations. There is reason to think that we in the academic language teaching profession may have a chance to win back some of the enrollments we have lost to the commercial schools, precisely because we have some expertise in the teaching of culture.

There are, of course, other ways in which we can turn the newly awakened interest in careers to our advantage. I have already referred to the growing variety of institutions, student populations, and time and space arrangements that are becoming more and more prevalent on the American scene. Adult education, both in the community college setting and in other contexts, happens to be the only segment of American education that still has some real potential for growth in the last quarter of the twentieth century. If we truly believe in the supportive value of foreign language skills in various occupations and professions, then we should not hesitate to make language instruction available on a wide scale to people who are actually working for a living. These are the people who presumably have the strongest possible motivation for acquiring new language skills: whether it be a reassignment, an expanded job responsibility, a sudden shift in marketing technique, a new clientele, or simply the desire to gain the competitive edge over fellow employees in the scramble for promotions. Again, if we are truly interested in community acceptance and community service, we should not hesitate to offer mini-courses, evening courses, Saturday sessions, or whatever is appropriate to the specific needs of the local population. Indeed, why should we not actively seek out potential students by sending flyers or catalog information to local businesses, industries, organizations, or clubs? The enrollments generated by such efforts on behalf of our special programs may ultimately justify the addition of a half or full-time teaching position to the department; better yet, they may ultimately lead to higher levels of enrollment in the regular daytime college courses as well.

This kind of approach can, of course, apply to any institution, but it seems to be particularly appropriate for the urban junior and community colleges. Many of them have, in fact, already developed exciting new courses aimed at the adult market. Generally speaking, however, language study has still only a very limited foothold in the two-year colleges, and in a number of them it is geared exclusively to the needs of students enrolled in the transfer program rather than of those in the terminal and vocational programs. The few examples of successful career-oriented language courses within the two-year college vocational programs need to be expanded and publicized as widely as possible. Since each such course has come into being in response to specific local needs, however, teachers are not always aware of comparable work being done at other institutions, particularly at other two-year colleges, which tend to work in relative isolation from one another. In an effort to supply this kind of curricular information on a national scale the MLA is currently undertaking, with support from the U.S. Office of Education, a special curriculum survey of all non-traditional and interdisciplinary courses in language, literature, and culture, with special emphasis on career-related and community-related courses and programs. It is anticipated that the survey will generate a central file of information on such courses that can be used to supply data to departments on a single inquiry basis. At the same time a catalog will be prepared for wide distribution, giving concise information about programs, indexed by language, subject matter, and type of institution.

In attempting to outline some of the steps that teachers and departments might begin to undertake to implement the career approach, I have been painfully aware of how difficult some of these steps will be for many of us, particularly those at smaller institutions, who are already fighting daily battles against budgets, against colleagues and administrators, and sometimes, regrettably, against students. I am quite aware that the career approach is not going to mean instant success for everyone overnight, simply because there are still too many unsolved problems.

One of the biggest short-range problems is the matter of materials. It is difficult enough to create homemade materials for subjects we know well, like grammar or culture, but it is infinitely more problematic when we are sailing on uncharted waters. Commercial materials appear to be a long way off in the future, given the fact that textbook publishers are naturally quite cautious about investing in materials for which the potential market cannot yet be defined or measured. Nevertheless, a few handbooks have emerged, and a couple of modular units appear to be coming up over the horizon, and in the meantime much good use can be made of native *realia:* magazines, newspapers, and commercial reports direct from the target country. For the most part, however, and for the foreseeable future, the career approach is going to demand a good measure of creativity, experimentation, and risk-taking from any teacher who accepts the challenge.

Over the long range, the profession is also going to have to take a long look at the career approach and decide whether it is truly an evolutionary development or merely a fad. If

in fact it succeeds in becoming a permanent development and if it bears fruit, we will probably need to revise our thinking about teacher training, for both schools and colleges. I am hopeful, however, that a shift in our teacher training will occur anyway, brought about by a recognition of the changing needs of the schools and colleges who hire the teachers trained by the graduate institutions. And this shift may itself be part of the "career approach," as we have been calling it. If we reflect on the word "approach", we begin to realize, I think, that we are talking only about means, not ends. Our traditional goals still seem reasonable to us, and we are simply seeking newer and more effective ways to reach them. If in my metaphor-hungry zeal I have asked you to take a "leap of faith" once or twice, please forgive me; a Giant Step for Mankind will do the job equally well.

NOTES

[1] Honig, Lucille J. and Richard I. Brod, "Foreign Languages and Careers." *Modern Language Journal* 58, 4 (April 1974), 157-185. Reprinted by the Modern Language Association, 1974.

[2] Steiner, Florence, "Career Education and Its Implications at the National Level." *MLJ* 58, 4 (April 1974), 186-91

[3] Lester, Kenneth and Toby Tamarkin, "Career Education," in *ACTFL Review of Foreign Language Education*, Vol. 5 (1974), ed. Gilbert A. Jarvis.

[4] "Careers, Community, and Public Awareness." Report of Working Committee III, in *Toward Student-Centered Foreign-Language Programs. Reports of the Working Committees.* 1974 Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.

[5] "Survey of FL Skills in Business and Service Organizations." *ADFL Bulletin* 5, 2 (Nov. 1973), 3-4.

[6] Brod, Richard I. "The Foreign Language Requirement—Report on the 1970-71 MLA Survey." *ADFL Bulletin* 3, 1 (Sept. 1971), 55-88.

[7] Tinsley, Royal L., Jr. "Guidelines for College and University Programs in Translator Training." *ADFL Bulletin* 4, 4 (May 1973), 15-21.

[8] Fuller, Carol S. "Language-Oriented Careers in the Federal Government." *ADFL Bulletin* 6, 1 (Sept. 1974), 45-51.

[9] For examples, see references in the text of Honig and Brod [no. 1].

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